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The final of five candidates for UNM Gallup Campus CEO, Dr. Carols Ayala, spoke in an open forum at the Student Services and Technology Center Oct. 25.

Ayala currently serves as the Dean of Education at the California State University at Sonoma, a position he has held since 2011.

“As dean I focused on our accreditation process,” Ayala said. “There are 23 campuses at California State University, the largest in the country. We as a unit have become a political force.”

Sharing his motivation for teaching, Ayala explained during his early years he accepted a teaching position in Calexico, Calif., a town on U.S.-Mexican border, where the temperature easily exceeds 100 degrees in the Summer.

Ayala accepted a teaching position after he could not make it in a business venture he started.

“I quickly learned what I was supposed to do—to support individuals, families, and the community,” Ayala said to his audience. “Education can transform a person. Increase economic viability and become aware.”

The town on the opposite side of the border is Mexicali, where Mexican nationals cross over into the United States.

“Some of the poorest kids in the State of California live there, with a Hispanic population of 80 percent.

State statistics show that in 2015, poverty in Calexico is 35 percent in comparison to the 20 percent California average.

“I grew up in Calexico,” Ayala said. “It’s half of the size of Gallup. I want to release the transformative power of education. When I heard about the position in Gallup, I believe myself and I my wife could come make a difference in the community.”

Ayala’s wife holds a long career in education. She has been teaching for 25 years, who within the last two years served as vice president and now enjoys serving as superintendent in her community.

“My family believes in the power of the university,” he said while elaborating on his two adult children, one who is pursing a Ph.D. while the other is in graduate school while working at Urban Outfitters.

“I have one more move left for me,” Ayala said, as he explained spending the last 15 years in Sonoma. “Gallup attracts me for lots of reasons. Once you have been in the Land of Enchantment you feel this connection to the land. When I go home I look for it and it’s not here.”

Ayala believes that college enrollment starts early. In his experience he works with students at the seventh grade level in preparing them for college in a local program he refers to as La Promessas.

“Each of us have a desire to build things, to tinker, to hack, and find ways to increase student

enrollment," he said. "Imagine walking into school and it's a lab—access to different machines."

Ayala uses a force of teachers to build programs and learning styles to attract student interest and build on education.

"I cannot do this myself," he said. "I have to find leadership to release that transformative power. I am hoping to come here and make a connection."

Ron Hunter, who serves as the CEO for the Middle College High School on campus asked Ayala about dual credits, a program where high school students earn college credits while in their junior and senior years.

"We brought the students here," Ayala responded, explaining a dual credit program where he currently serves. "We have other partnership programs. We create these programs and these models are powerful models. We get students through the particular systems."

The UNM-G campus corrected enrollment information being more than previously reported. There are 995 full time students enrolled this Fall season, with 1,219 part-time students.

New programs offered this Fall include an associate degree in environmental planning and design as well as basic and advance certificates in emergency medical services.

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